

# STUDENT ESSAY

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## GRENADA REMEMBERED: A PERSPECTIVE A NARRATIVE ESSAY ON OPERATION URGENT FURY

BY

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This work narrates the personal experiences of an Infantry battalion commander on Operation Urgent Fury, the 1983 student rescue mission to Grenada, West Indies. The essay describes the events immediately before deployment, the planning, preparation and deployment itself, as well as highlights from the twenty-eight day stay on the island for the 1st Battalion 505th Airborne Infantry, 82d Airborne Division. The unit was the third 82d Airborne Battalion deployed, arriving on D+1 and remaining through D+29. Highlighted is the mission to locate, secure and evacuate 183 medical students, as well as the transition from combat to peacekeeping and stability operations. The star of the show is the individual U.S. Paratrooper.

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Grenada Remembered: A Perspective;  
A Narrative Essay On Operation Urgent Fury  
An Individual Essay

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## ABSTRACT

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## GRENADA REMEMBERED: A PERSPECTIVE

October 25th, 1983 the United States military launched forces to the island of Grenada on what was named Operation "URGENT FURY". The primary missions were to rescue threatened US medical students and to restore peace and democracy to the troubled island paradise.

I was the commander of the third 82d Airborne Division battalion to deploy. It is the purpose of this essay to describe the events of the first four days of the operation as seen through my eyes.

### THE SETTING

To understand the deployment process it is necessary to first describe the operational posture and readiness procedures for the 82d Airborne Division. Otherwise, the reader may associate the deployment with personal experiences and fail to grasp the degree of emphasis placed on no-notice crisis contingency deployments at Ft Bragg and thereby erroneously conclude that America's airborne division launched on an exercise for which it was unprepared. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The basic operational cycles of the division are designed to support deployments. These cycles are combined with a numbering system which designates the order of deployment for every unit of the division. The basic

building block is the infantry battalion task-force, capable of rapid deployment of pre-designated forces from company size to combined-arms reinforced battalions. The three infantry brigades are similarly aligned and are capable of tailoring all elements of the division for specific missions.

Thus, the three brigades and their "slice" of combat, combat support and combat service support elements are continually designated as "Division Ready Brigade (DRB) 1,2,3. Likewise the battalions (called "DRF" for Division Ready Force) within the brigades are designated in their corresponding order of readiness and deployability. On any day of the year the array would look like this:

<u>DRB 1</u>	<u>DRB 2</u>	<u>DRB 3</u>
o DRF 1	o DRF 4	o DRF 7
o DRF 2	o DRF 5	o DRF 8
o DRF 3	o DRF 6	o DRF 9

The operational cycles correspond to the unit's DRF status and dictate the type and nature of training, the degree of readiness and numerous other factors such as recall standards, leave and pass percentages as well as the actual numerical order the division would deploy to war.

The cycles and their associated forces are:

Mission Cycle- DRB 1 (with DRF's 1,2,3)

Training Cycle- DRB 2

### Support Cycle- DRB 3

At the risk of oversimplification, the DRB 1's primary business is readiness for worldwide deployment, as embodied in the 82d Airborne's stated mission of:

"Be prepared to deploy, worldwide, on little or no notice by parachute assault, fight on arrival. . . and win . . ."

The DRB 2's task is collective training while the DRB 3 performs post support functions generally of an administrative nature. Cycles are six weeks in length and progressive such that a unit has a training cycle just before a mission cycle in order to be in the best possible state of collective training when sitting in the hot-spot for deployment.

Further, deployability training at all levels is a mindset for the division and the Ft Bragg community, including the adjoining Pope Air Force Base. Procedures are outlined in elaborate detail in the "RSOP" or Readiness SOP, a document that is the Army's model for rapid deployment, and has been the basis over the years for units such as the Ranger battalions and the 7th Infantry Division's (Light) deployment procedures.

As a minimum, the division exercises the system monthly by a secret, close-hold deployment exercises for at least a



battalion-sized or larger task force. Again, the reader should not confuse the "pre-coordinated" no-notice exercises that other units conduct as the 82d model. Since a unit's reputation is on the line in each one of these exercises, they are serious business. The majority of these involve the seizure of an arrival airfield by forced-entry (parachute assault) to include live artillery fire from the drop zone and live fire maneuver; exactly the scenario given the division in Grenada.

This deployment mission had been given additional emphasis by the arrival of MG Edwin L. Trobaugh in the summer of 1983, manifested by a number of extremely close-hold exercises over the six months prior to URGENT FURY.

For example, my battalion had been "Called Out" (jargon for a no-notice exercise) three times in two weeks while sitting as DRF 1 earlier in the summer. MG Trobaugh's message to the division was that he took the deployment mission deadly serious and he "expected the same of every paratrooper wearing the Double A."

#### OCTOBER

Sunday, October 24th found my battalion having just completed five weeks field training and resting over the weekend. I was at the end of a training cycle, although, due to the upcoming deployment of the 1st Battalion (Abn) 325th PIR to the Multinational Force and Observers mission, which

excluded the Falcons from the deployment scheme, we were also technically the DRF 3 with the second brigade's other two battalions.

Sunday I received a call from the division staff duty officer directing me to report to division headquarters immediately. I assumed this to be a training mission, but upon arrival I found the key leaders from the division staff and command group as well as leaders and commanders from the second brigade involved in a close-hold planning session. I was tasked to plan for the contingency deployment to Grenada, allocated 7 C-141B aircraft and to plan primarily for airland assault, but also for parachute assault. This, along with intelligence briefings took the remainder of the day. The task was facilitated by the fact that the two other battalion commanders were drilling the same problem. I emerged with a sobering sense of concern and a renewed appreciation for the S-3 Air staffs who usually attend to the tedium of load planning.

Monday arrived without further input to the mission, except that my aircraft allocated for a Monday night mass airborne operation at Ft Bragg had disappeared. While this is not a normal situation, it occurs frequently enough so as not to raise an OPSEC concern. My brigade commander and I discussed whether to progress with the scheduled field exercise or to stand by and wait. Since the latter option obviously did have OPSEC implications, it was decided to press on with scheduled training as part of the cover.

The battalion deployed to the field that afternoon and was in the midst of an assembly exercise when the recall message came. The mission was to assemble the battalion, lock-in (jargon for isolate/secure yourself for a mission-with all literally confined or "locked" in the unit area) and increase your readiness posture. This recall and lock-in took until approximately 0200 hrs, Tuesday, 25 October and was to have an impact on the amount of sleep leaders were to have had prior to arriving in Grenada. I spent a fitful three hours trying to sleep on the floor of my office, worrying about the usual details to be considered should we go.

Tuesday morning I didn't need to be told that the second brigade was deploying, as the sights and sounds of a deployment were evident to a seasoned observer: additional trucks on Ardenne Street, troopers everywhere in the second brigade area with weapons and the brigade's barracks emptying of troopers. I proceeded to division headquarters where the most telling evidence was that the assault staff and battle staff were all missing.

Proceeding to the operations center, I was escorted into the "vault" where I was fascinated to find a tacsat radio terminal (a portable URC/101) with a liaison officer from another operational command at Ft Bragg. The traffic was obviously actual combat, the high command net of a joint task force with traffic between several ground stations and an airborne command post and various fire support means. I listened for an hour or more, and were this a classified

work, could describe some fantastic operations and dispel several myths that have abounded from the operation.

I proceed back to the battalion, knowing that a fight was on and that our likelihood of deployment was high. In fact, the order to depart for the XVIII Airborne Corps secure marshalling area was awaiting me as were several officers who had observed various pieces of the deployment and could recognize that it was the real thing. For example, my support platoon leader reported that he had just returned from Green Ramp (deployment/outload area, Pope AFB) and that he had seen the unprecedented peacetime activity of issuing and rigging live Dragon missiles, in mass, as well as the other basic load items normally not flown in an unrestricted manner short of combat. (E.G.; strapping hand grenades on individual jumpers.)

The remainder of the day was spent with movement to the marshalling area, and planning the deployment. The "go" order was received later in the day, but the seven C-141B's would not be available until 0700 the following day, or D+1 as it was then numbered.

The order to deploy was received with calm professionalism by leaders and was viewed, I believe, by the individual soldier as "thank God we're going, I'd hate for my fellow paratroopers to get in on a fight and me not be there." I once asked a grinning trooper why he was smiling and he replied, "Sir, this is what our country pays us for."

Obviously, the fact that a soldier is tactically

prepared and trained fosters this attitude, but also the administrative readiness plays a part. Factors such as his automobile inventoried and stored in the guarded holding lot or his wife a member of the family support group add to his peace of mind. It is mandatory for all troopers to have wills and powers-of-attorney for key areas, also a factor contributing to peace of mind and the ability for one to concentrate on the business at hand.

Again, the sleep factor was to play as the battalion was required to draw ammunition in the middle of the night, a circumstance necessitated by a schedule designed to not interrupt the flow of follow-on units. Although we were working, I'm not sure how much sleep we would have been able to get were we at home in our own beds.

Reports from Grenada had confirmed the employment of armored vehicles, thus a need for anti-tank weapons. At the same time we were told not to take TOW anti-tank missiles, that enough were on the island and that LAWs, Dragons and 90mm recoilless rifles were all that was required for the threat.

This leads to a valid criticism, in that we took over 120 Dragons, several hundred LAWs in addition to our small arms, all having the effect of overloading the individual soldier. This was coupled with the threat of no sources of potable water (proved to be not true) necessitating drawing extra canteens from contingency stocks. More water, more weight. Since history has shown the airborne force in an

airhead to be vulnerable to resupply, the normal course is to take it now rather than betting the come. I reasoned we could always drop rucksacks as was the SOP if contact was imminent, or in classic airborne fashion, we would build up supplies at the arrival airfield. Examples of extra baggage taken was 20 five-gallon water cans per aircraft, hand-carried on and strapped to the ramp for offloading and use in Grenada. It has been said if an airborne logistician can figure out how the individual trooper gets water on the afternoon of the first day, then the rest is simple.

The flight was unremarkable for the first two hours of the three and one-half hour trip, except that I was a bit surprised to note that the crew was USAF reserves from Norton AFB in southern California. I had expected the 437th MAW from Charleston, SC to be the lifting unit. I was later to hear that OPSEC had precluded tagging any one unit to fly the mission and that the airlift was done by "fragging" or FRAGORDER from HQ MAC. Most troops simply slept the first part of the flight.

At the slated arrival time the loadmaster informed us that we were in a holding orbit, due to an aircraft on the runway and that it would be perhaps an hour before we could land. He added that other flights had been forced to divert either to Barbados or Roosevelt Roads NAS PR! We could clearly see out the window that a lone C-141 was parked at the extreme end of the 10,000 foot runway and that under the conditions a second could certainly land.

This situation astounded me in that the buildup of forces was stalled because of a non-problem. Here we were orbiting a magnificent new airfield, now limited to a MOG (maximum-on-ground) of one. Clearly, this is one of the problems facing forced-entry operations and it is one of the primary reasons for more than one brigade on parachute status. By airdropping, even on a then secured runway, you are able to build strength incredibly fast. It would have taken 65 seconds to empty the 120 troopers aboard the aircraft compared with the landing, taxi, offload and departure time for the same force airlanding. The same can be said for the heavy drop of equipment. Hindsight is perfect and there may have been some sensitivity to the fact that AAA ringed the airfield and all of it was not accounted for, or more likely, the congestion was simply not anticipated.

My aircraft had my battalion assault CP, my alpha company and the assault CP of the third brigade. On learning of the dilemma, the third brigade commander, Col James T. Scott (whose foot was in a cast from a recent jump injury) and myself climbed atop the center seat supports and made forward to the cockpit to sort out the situation. Col Scott produced the frequency of the 82d Airborne's CP and asked for an aircraft radio and frequency to talk to the ground. Enroute communications had not been provided for the ground commanders of our sorties. Scott told the division to run out to the active runway, find the USAF Combat Control Team and have them let our aircraft (tail #) land. In 10 minutes

we were cleared to land. Had this emergency transmission not occurred, I am confident the leadership of my battalion and the third brigade would have spent the night in Barbados as was the fate of the three of the remaining four of my companies. I'm sure I wasn't the first airborne commander to realize, too late, that his fate was in USAF hands, yet there is undoubtedly a new lesson there somewhere.

On the ground, events happened fast. It was quite evident by the fact that the Ranger's perimeter of security literally had its back to the runway, that the airhead at that point was the runway, itself and little else.

In the course of the next two hours I was able to take in an eyeful and accomplish quite a bit, including:

- Visit to Division TOC where I received a briefing on the enemy and friendly situation and on the planned attack out of the airhead the following day.

- Link-up and briefing by the Ranger battalion commander as well as the commander of the lead battalion of paratroopers.

- Recon of the eastern front trace of troops where I would pass through the next day.

- Recon of Frequente barracks, the weapons storage site. The amount and types of weapons surprised me. As has been stated there was enough there to outfit an entire division of fighters. I left when the area came under fire, as rounds were rattling around in the warehouses filled with arms and ammunition. Since at least one US platoon was returning



fire, I was potentially in the way, or more worrisome, my unit would be called to help and I was not there.

Shortly, the Grand-Anse student-rescue was launched by the Rangers, and it was then I realized that the artillery from the 82d Abn was firing across the active runway, thereby closing it to traffic for each fire mission. What I did not know was that this was the only secure ground reasonably available when the battery arrived and it had literally wheeled off the aircraft and into action.

I was emotionally buoyed by the return of the Ranger's helicopters filled with students. The troopers were offloading and whooping for joy with their success.

The remainder of the day was spent with receiving a second company, and planning the next morning's attack out of the airhead.

The 82d has been criticized for being slow to move out of the airhead, and too deliberate in expanding the operational area to take the strategic plum of St George's city, but let's review from the worms eye view.

- The Rangers had incurred unexpected opposition.

- The Frequent arms cache had revealed large amounts of weapons, enough to give credence to some intelligence reports of several thousand enemy.

- The airhead had been counterattacked by armored vehicles.

- The Rangers had lost a gun jeep and crew to an ambush just East of the airfield.

-Virtually every foot of ground, up until then had been contested.

This was later to be contrasted by the Marines who landed in dramatic fashion at the Pearl's airfield and swept mounted across two-thirds of the island in two days. From my perspective, the Marines were relatively unopposed and had a virtual "walk in the sun" compared to activities around Point Salines.

I feel MG Trobaugh was entirely prudent and completely justified for proceeding as he did. Not only did he have a tenuous hold on the airfield, but no troops were available to attack outward.

#### **ATTACK TO EXPAND THE AIRHEAD**

The plan for D+2 called for the Rangers to continue to secure the Point Salines airfield while the two battalions from second brigade and myself from third brigade attack eastward toward St George's and the high ground surrounding the airfield and city.

I was not to move until the last battalion from second brigade cleared the runway and secured the flank of my initial advance. Thus the scheduled 0600 departure time for the operation was closer to 1100 for my lead company. My scheme of maneuver was a series of company bounds, each

overwatched by another rifle company, designed to expand the airhead by four kilometers.

Since there were many houses to search and clear and we were clearing the area that encompassed the Ranger ambush, the armor counterattack (Cuban dead were still in the vehicles) as well as the area fire was continually received from, thoroughness was a necessity.

Clearing proceeded as planned, although slower than I had anticipated, until approximately 1600 hrs. It was then we watched the 2-75 Rangers launch an airmobile raid on Calivegney Barracks, a People's Revolutionary Army (PRA) installation eight kilometers from the airfield. We were advised that that operation had priority of 105mm Arty fire and was using the one available AC-130 gunship. In addition, my brigade commander was taken away to command the operation.

It was during this time that my Bravo company as well as several elements of 2-325 Infantry (2d Bde) came under fire from several automatic weapons. My units reported approximately three AK-47's firing from a house and requested supporting fires. I requested through my USAF Air Liaison Officer (ALO) use of the AC-130, since it could not only see the target best, but could attack it with very precise fire. Request denied, there was a problem with the Ranger operation we were told.

Suddenly A-7's began to appear and orbit, obviously with the possibility of launching a strike somewhere. I was concerned as to who had called the aircraft and who was

directing them. The fighters made several passes dropping ordnance with most passes, and with each pass I would call my units to see if they had observed the pass and how it had been in relation to their positions. The target was approximately 600 meters from my position and I was also concerned with my CP being that close and not knowing who was directing the strike and whether the individual directing knew we were there. Since I was less than 100 meters from an army ambulance (Red-Cross marked) I wasn't terribly concerned. Still, one wonders.

I was later to learn over the radio that the second brigade TOC had been strafed by the A-7's with the loss of US life on one of the passes.

It was also during this encounter that one of my snipers scored a confirmed kill on an enemy shooting from a window. A head-shot at 300 meters.

My overwatching company had requested to fire in support of my bravo company's contact, but lacking observable targets and owing to the rules of engagement (no fire into houses unless ID'd) they were denied.

The day ended with a dry season rainstorm that soaked everyone prior to dark. The rifle companies perimetered for the night and the battalion command post was separately secured by antitank platoons acting as infantry without their TOW systems.

The following day's operation plan was received before dark, for which I was thankful in that it enabled me to plan,

brief, and make adjustments in a timely fashion. Most significantly, it allowed myself and other leaders to get some sleep, which by that time was a prime consideration.

## THE STUDENTS

My D+3 mission was to continue clearing and expanding, with a be-prepared to locate and evacuate US students from Lance-aux-Pins peninsula. We had just begun the former when a call came to execute the latter. It was to prove to be the emotional high for the entire operation.

The locate, secure and evacuate mission was unique in that no one was certain as to exactly where or how many students were involved. The plan was to secure the area and the associated high ground, then search house-to-house for students. Link-up with a representative of a US Agency revealed that possibly in excess of 150 students were hiding on the peninsula. This caused an rapid change of plan from one of evacuation of a handful of students by surface transportation to an air evacuation. This meant an evacuation site and accounting procedures as the situation allowed.

What unfolded caught us all off-guard. Somehow we just weren't prepared for the students to run to us , crying, laughing, praying, typically hugging and kissing us repeating THANK YOU, THANK YOU, GOD BLESS AMERICA! We were perhaps

expecting surly students, mad at being taken from their homes and the possibility of being spit upon had crossed my mind. (the VietNam experience)

The students handed over gifts of everything from whiskey (we gave it back) to automobiles (we secured it until an island resident who housed the student reclaimed it). The only unwelcome item was the students repeatedly calling us Marines. The students had heard we were Marines from the BBC East Caribbean station but were quick to note that we were sensitive to that miscalculation. In all, 183 students were evacuated along with 21 third-country nationals, primarily British and Canadians. One charming older British couple arrived "dressed" for the occasion", complete with formal attire and jewels. I detailed an officer to personally assist the lady aboard the Blackhawk.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Although I will end the description of the 1st Battalion 505th Airborne Infantry's role with this day, I want to digress and pick up some other points.

Earlier, I mentioned the weight a trooper carries and the need to distribute water and ammunition. Since my vehicles were two jeeps (Cdr, S-3) from the battalion CP, four gun jeeps from the scouts, and two ambulances plus the

aid-station M561, we were immediately in need of logistical transportation despite the fact that we ,in theory, had carried three day's rations and ammo on our backs.

The transportation problem was solved by combat elements who took control of indigenous PRA personal light trucks that were operational and by the repair of a number of Soviet and East German 2 1/2 ton trucks by my battalion maintenance technician. Not only did CW2 Thacker provide trucks for us, but he was able to essentially outfit the brigade with enough lift to haul rucksacks, rations and ammunition. These, for the most part were taken from a truck park near the airfield and the Frequent Arms cache site. The miracle was that CW2 Thacker was able to diagnose, cannibalize and fix in a matter of hours a fleet of trucks that we later learned had been broken for months.

While this has been a chronicle of events, I would be remiss if I were to fail to note the impact of seeing, first-hand, a communist revolution in the process of strangling an open freedom-loving people. I believe that most officers and soldiers first hand experience in VietNam did little to show the true nature of a Marxist-Leninist revolution. This probably owes to the fact that in VietNam the revolution was underground and hidden. Also, the average GI did not speak Vietnamese and could only guess as to what the written propaganda or the people had to say.

We saw in Grenada a society where the people were turned against one another as spies to observe and report those not

loyal to the revolution. Houses were marked as to the arm of the party one belonged to; the absence of markings identified dissenters. The now released reports by The Departments of State and Defense testify to plans to take over businesses, land, banks even the clergy through tactics of intimidation, assignation, brutality and harassment. It is noteworthy to see that each member of the worldwide communist community shows up for a "piece of the action". North Koreans, Soviets, Cubans, Bulgarians, Lybians, and others each worked their role of terror. Horrified school teachers told us of mandatory revolutionary dogma as elementary curriculum and how innocent teachers were lured to communist countries for free college educations with the mistaken idea that there would be no pay-back. Once into the debt of Marxism, the Grenadians reported they could not escape with their lives.

Finally, I have dwelled on the positive aspects of the operation and have avoided writing and digging for things that went wrong: Stalwarts such as Mr. Lind has done that for his country. Yet I don't intend to give the impression that all was a piece of cake or that mistakes weren't made. I would merely offer the comparison to my experiences in two tours in VietNam and conclude that URGENT FURY was first class in every respect by comparison.

I am truly thankful for the opportunity to serve and lead those of the caliber who in October, 1983 answered the call.